

Assignments

Course: Strategy Communication, 6 cr. ©Pekka Pälli 2021

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General document settings instruction

In all writing assignments, use “normal” margins, 2,54 cm (1 inch) on all sides. You should use a clear font that is highly readable. Recommendation: 12 pt. Times New Roman font, single-spaced. In the documents where you use subtitles: leave two empty lines before the subtitle and one empty line after. Bold the subtitles (but do not center).

1 REFLECTION PAPERS (=weekly papers, 25% of the course grade)

The aim of reflection paper exercise is, first, to introduce you some key insights regarding specific topics in the course and provide academic viewpoints that go beyond and deepen the content of the lectures. Second, the aim is to practice, in addition to academic writing, academic reading in particular. Please take the following advice: it is not that you should understand everything in a specific paper; in academic reading it is most important to capture the main messages of the paper and to get how the paper goes about in its argumentation. Also, while you are most welcome to be for example critical towards some specific paper, your short reflections are not, and shouldn't be, reviews in the sense of assessments or evaluations of the papers. In academic writing, you *use* the ideas, results etc. of the paper; evaluating (reviewing) papers is a different genre.

In addition, the readings you reflect on should not only expand your academic and practical knowledge of the field, but also give you ideas and tools that are helpful in your group work too.

Most importantly, and as the name implies, you are to *reflect* upon what you have learned and what is, for you, the key take-away of the article you read. It may have to do with the content area of strategy or strategy communication, it may have to do with the method, or some theory, or it may even connect to some very practical working life experience.

Reflection papers are so-called weekly papers, as they relate to and expand on the themes addressed in that week's lectures.

Word count: 300-400 words / paper.

Deadlines: First two papers (upload them in one file, that one file thus having two reflections...) Monday 18.1. (23:55), next two papers, Monday 25.11., and last two papers, Monday 1.2.

2 LEARNING SUMMARY (25% of course grade)

Learning summary is a paper in which you display and reflect upon what you have learned during the course. During the course means three important facets or arenas for learning: 1) class sessions, 2) readings, and 3) group work outside class.

For example, you can elaborate on the ways in which your learning achievements have contributed to your “professional portfolio”—your skills and expertise as a (business) professional. What sort of new knowledge, cognitive skills and insights have you gained through reading the articles, writing the reaction papers, or participating in discussions in class? How does it improve your professional capabilities as a scholar or knowledge worker?

You may organize the discussion in the summary around a particular theme, problem or question—or a set of questions. You don’t have to cover every single theme or thing that the course touched upon: concentrate on the essential ones (or those that you feel were essential to you). A good learning summary does not just present bits and pieces of this and that in the lectures and in the readings, but draws connections and thusly aims at providing a coherent whole.

When you talk about the readings, you are required to explicitly refer to them (and use academic citing conventions). Of course, because this is a learning summary, you do not have to cite them all, but cite the ones that you talk about. You may freely use pieces of text that you have written in the reflection papers in this assignment too.

When you consider your group work, you may reflect upon and evaluate your communication and negotiation skills and practices both as individuals and as a team. How did you contribute to the team, how did others? How did the group dynamics affect the results of the strategic analysis and strategy communication plan? Etc.

Word count: 1500-2000 words (without title page and references). Title page should have the following information: Learning Summary, your name, student number, course name, and date. You may add a contents section there in the title page as well.

Deadline: 26 February.

3 GROUP WORK (50% of course grade)

Case assignment:

You are divided into teams by the teacher in our first meeting.

Choose an organization. It may be just any organization. However, it would be helpful that you select an organization where one of your team members works (or has worked) and thus has some “insider knowledge”. In addition, it may help you that you choose an organization that communicates about itself (and possibly about its strategy) also formally through its websites and possible other materials. As the deliverables of your work, you are to:

- a) produce and present an analysis of the organization’s current strategy – on the basis of how the organization communicates its strategy or how and what the organization communicates in general. Remember that communicating strategy is not only about communicating strategy in itself, but that whatever the firm communicates can be seen to communicate the strategy, whether deliberately or inadvertently.

Deliverable: PowerPoint presentation in class (in Zoom), presented in student Workshop 1, where you present yourself, and discuss, and give feedback to others’ analyses/presentations. The length of your team presentations should not exceed 12-13 minutes.

- b) produce and present a strategy communication plan for the organization. Here you should start with your own analysis and build on that in your plan. In other words, in workshop 1 you are to present a strategic analysis, which you then use for as the basis for your plan of strategy communication.

Deliverable: PowerPoint presentation in class, presented in student Workshop 2, where you present yourself, and discuss, and give feedback to others’ strategic plans/presentations. The length of your team presentations should not exceed 12-13 minutes.

In addition, you are to write up a short summary (number 3 in the list below), 6-8 pages + if needed, you can put some extra information in the appendix) which presents the strategy plan with the strategic analysis.

Schedule of the deliverables

1. Workshop 1 where you present the strategic analyses in class: Wed 10 February. (Slide shows of strategic analyses to be uploaded on 9th February.)
2. Workshop 2 where you present your strategy communication plans in class: Wed 17 February. (Slide shows of strategic plans to be uploaded on 16th February)
3. Summary of your Strategy communication plan (text document, combining the analysis and the plan): deadline Mon 22 February.

Strategic analysis (to be presented in Workshop number 1)

Strategic analyses are presented in our student workshop 1, where teams give each other feedback and discuss the plausibility of the analyses. The idea is to use the feedback for your work on strategic plans.

As this is a MSc level course, it is expected that you have some idea of strategic analysis already. The number one objective is thus not to teach the ingredients of strategic analysis. Instead, we in this course zoom in on the communicative side of analysis: e.g. that although the facts in the given organization and its operational environment are what they are, the “what they are” is always communicational in the sense that you have to arrive at those facts through communicative process (negotiating the facts and what they mean within your group). In addition, what you then finally present as your analysis is of course a “communicational product”.

Your strategic analysis should be understandable to both external and internal stakeholders and other interest groups. So, you should – as is the case in any strategic analysis – first and **briefly**

- describe the basic details and give relevant context of the organization: these might include the raison d'être, turnover, amount of personnel, and market share.

In the actual analysis you are to

- Define the client segments and their specific needs; define the offering (core products and services); You might also want to define what is the added value to the client segment i.e. what is it in the offering that fulfills the client need in a way that the client is ready to pay for. Also, describe the competitive advantage i.e. what is it in the offering that differentiates the company/organization from the competitors. More specifically, you may find it useful to think about and analyze the “elements” in the offering and in the particular way of operating that create added value to the client segment and differentiate you from your competitors, e.g. defining the strengths and development needs within your management and personnel, the way of working, the processes and structure, your partners, and your systems and resources (management system, IT, brand, financial resources, premises etc.)
- Also, depending on your specific case organization, in your overall framing for analysis (and/or as an independent theme) you could consider e.g. mega-trends in your industry and (business) environment, and, accordingly, expected changes in operational environment (could be related to e.g. political and economic factors)
- You are to use some strategic analysis framework or tool (e.g. SWOT works well in almost any context). You can easily find information and instructions on most popular strategic analysis tools from the Internet. Also, of numerous practical and managerial textbooks in the field, “The Strategy Book” by Max McKeown (2011) can be recommended (it introduces a number of strategy tools with examples on how to use them).
- Importantly, you are to look into and analyze these things against the backdrop of the organization’s existing strategy (its mission, vision, and strategy statement in particular). So, the idea is also to find out how the existing formal communication about strategy (in a form of mission, vision, and strategy statement, and core values etc. specifically) corresponds to the results of your analysis

The big idea and overall rationale of this course is not, however, to just conduct a strategic analysis *per se*; not even with a twist of taking at the same time into account the mission, vision etc. stuff that's already there in the organization's strategy. Instead, the idea is to conduct an analysis that takes into account how the organization communicates its strategic choices (its strategy). Thus, when you look into and analyze things such as what is the client segment or what is the offering etc. you are not only analyzing what is the client segment or what is the offering but also and more importantly, *how the organization communicates* those issues and how the organization's communication (the way it communicates, whom it communicates to etc.) is aligned with or in accord with these issues.

Workshop 2: Strategy communication plan

In the workshop 2, you are to *present your planned actions for strategy communication in your case organization*. Consider for example the following questions when creating your plan:

- How could the strategy be communicated so that it would (better) align with the results of your strategic analysis?
- How should the strategy be told to different stakeholders
- How would the strategy be told and communicated in general?
- What kind of communicative means and measures – and styles and modes of communication – would support the execution of successful strategy in your case organization?

Below is a scheme which you can apply in your local context. You are not expected to go step-by-step having all the points and all the information mentioned below. (Given also that it would perhaps result in too many details). So, **the following list is just to help you, just some suggestions** of what kinds of things strategy communication plans typically consist of and what is their order.

Example contents of 'Strategy Communication Plan'

1. Brief description of the organization/business and its environment
2. SWOT (or some other model) (= summary of the analysis)
3. Summary of existing strategy (Mission, Vision and Strategy Statement in particular)
4. Objectives of communication
5. Action plans for communicating (means and measures, resources, schedule)
6. Key performance indicators (Numerical (or other) objectives/indicators for following up the realization of strategy communication plan over time.)

A concluding remark on the overall rationale

Indeed, you have actually done communicative strategy work in group before you present your plans in the workshop to your fellow students. However, the objective is to get you to realize that your plan and how you present is also a part of strategy communication. In essence, your plan is of course a product of communication and an act of communication. Hence, we can say that the success of your plan is inextricably related to how well it communicates to the audience (and how you can "sell" it to the audience; audience here being your peer student groups.)

4 Note on attendance

Please note that attending the lectures (except lecture 1) is *not mandatory*. Still, it is highly important that you could make it to the class sessions marked as workshops. Overall, attendance is *strongly recommended* in order to get the designed learning take-aways of the course. Furthermore, participation unavoidably makes it easier for you to write the learning summary. Also, by active participation you can earn extra points which may have an effect on your grade – particularly in cases where the average score of the deliverables would be close to .5 (e.g. average score 4,3 may round up to 5 with excellent participation).